

Covert Reflections on Italian Films

By Roland Dallas

Reuter

ROME—Actor David Janssen is making a film here about a renegade agent from the Central Intelligence Agency and forming some opinions about the Italian movie industry at the same time.

Janssen, star of the long-running television series "The Fugitive" and "Harry O," plays the part of an agent who leaves the CIA, writes an expose of the agency and then runs into trouble when he tries to follow up a covert action.

The plot bears some similarities to the story of former CIA agent Philip Agee, who wrote a best-selling expose called "Inside the Company" and has been ordered to leave Britain and Holland.

Janssen has also run into trouble with the Italian film industry over a ruling by the government, which is trying to stop a wave of domestic violence, that revolvers may not be fired in new films made here.

"There's no flash, no smoke," he said. "In the United States, we use revolvers without rifling in the barrel and fire blanks."

"This may have some value in Italy but it really isn't going to solve the film industry's problems," he said. "We are going to Greece for the shots where guns are fired."

Relaxing in a rooftop bar overlooking old Rome, Janssen also complained that Italian filmmakers prefer to record voices after shooting and "are almost adamant about not using live sound."

"This way they just don't compete," he insisted. "Original sound is what the public has grown used to."

Janssen also objected to Italian filmmakers' practice of producing a film in English but allowing non-English actors to speak in their own language and then dubbing voice-overs.

"English-speaking moviegoers demand that English be spoken," he added.

Janssen was happy about one development here—a growing recognition that a film's script was as important as its visual images.

"They have been making films the same way here for 20 years," he said. "Cinematographically they are marvelous. Their style was an outgrowth of three or four marvelous directors. Fellini, De Sica, Visconti and Zeffirelli."

Janssen believes that the traditional stress on visual images here is fading and "they are conceding now that the script is important."

In his film here, called "Covert Action," Janssen plays a CIA agent who writes two unsuccessful novels after his expose and falls on hard times.

"He goes back to Athens on the trail of some other covert actions which he thinks will put him on the best-seller list again," Janssen said.

"The CIA physically blocks his inquiries to such an extent that they threaten him," he added.

Much of the plot, which includes French actress Corinne Clery, star of "The story of 'O,'" as a former girl friend and Arthur Kennedy as a CIA agent, focuses on a missing tape recording believed to damage the CIA's prestige.

"People suffer and die and romance is rekindled," Janssen said. "It's a spy thriller which tries to make its characters real people."